DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 443 CS 007 019

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TITLE A Survey of Selected Reading Practices and Inservice Needs in Georgia Schools.
PUB DATE Nov 81
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, November 1981).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Organization; Classroom Techniques; *Educational Needs; Educational Research; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Needs Assessment; Occupational Surveys; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Teachers; *Teacher Education; Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS Georgia

ABSTRACT

A pilot study was conducted to determine the practices and perceived needs for inservice education of reading teachers in Georgia. A questionnaire was sent to individuals responsible for overseeing the reading programs for grades one through eight in 52 Georgia school systems; 37 returned it. Analysis of their responses indicated a need for training teachers in Georgia in the use of patterns of organization other than the traditional classroom organization of three ability groups and whole class instruction. The desire expressed by the respondents for a basic reading course may be the result of the fact that such a course is required for a teaching certificate in Georgia. The last major concern of the respondents, more courses in classroom management and organization, may be the result of the growing demands on teachers produced by back to basics movements, due process for students, mainstreaming, and competency-based teaching and testing. (JL)

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A Survey of Selected Reading Practices and Inservice Needs in Georgia Schools

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Paper presented on November 14, 1981, at the annual meeting of the Georgia Educational Research Association in Atlanta, Georgia.

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A Survey of Selected Reading Practices and

Inservice Needs in Georgia Schools

In A Synthesis of Research on Reading with Recommendations for Instruction in Georgia Schools, Hall, Richardson, Ramig, Johnson, and Haley-James (1978) recommended that school reading programs include a variety of methods. Inservice/staff development consultants from Georgia Colleges can make a valuable contribution to an inservice program provided they meet the needs of the particular school systems. Special care must be taken when planning such programs when there is great distance between the consultant and inservice participants. Morrison and Austin (1977) recommended that greater effort be expended on the part of college personnel to help local authorities build a strong inservice program in reading. Therefore, prior to an inservice program, Smith, Otto, and Hansen (1978) suggested that college consultants learn as much as possible about the present practices of instruction in the schools and the materials in current use. Perceived needs for college courses and inservice programs may also prove helpful to inservice consultants responsible for designing inservice programs.

The present writers designed a questionnaire entitled "Survey of Practices and Inservice Needs". The questionnaire was designed to provide inservice/college personnel with background information that would enable them to devise more worthwhile, productive staff development programs. The pilot questionnaire was of a global nature, its use

intended to determine the major areas of concern for course and/or inservice needs which could be more specifically delineated in future surveys. Local variables such as the perceived needs for college courses and inservice workshops were considered prime determiners or the "starting point" in planning local inservice programs.

Procedures

Since the researchers are from North Georgia College and they primarily serve teachers and schools of the northeast Georgia area, the twenty-six school systems in the Ninth Congressional District were sent the "Survey of Practices and Inservice Needs" questionnaire. In order to determine if these perceived needs and practices were similar to those in other areas of the state, twenty-six school systems were randomly selected from the remainder of school systems in the state of Georgia and added to the sample. The fifty-two copies of the questionnaire were sent to either curriculum directors or school superintendents with a request for them to forward the forms to the individuals who had the major responsibility for overseeing the reading program in that school system.

At the end of approximately three weeks, seventeen forms (32.69%) had been returned, Reminder letters with second copies of the questionnaires were sent to the systems that had not returned the forms. After this request, twenty additional forms were received. The total

of thirty-seven forms represented 71.15% of the sample. Twenty-one forms (80.8% return) came from the Ninth Congressional District. Sixteen forms (61.5%return) came from remaining areas of the state.

Results

The first and second questions on the survey provided background information on approximate enrollment of students in the school system in grades one through eight and the approximate percentage of students that had as their central form of organization for reading the following: three ability based groups, multi-ability based groups (other than three groups), individualized programs, whole class instruction, skills based groups, and others. (See Appendix A for definition of terms.) Results for the Ninth Congressional District and the remainder of the state are reported in Table 1. It should be noted that two of the thirty-seven forms were eliminated from these results since the forms did not contain the information requested in the first two questions.

The major pattern of organizing for reading for the two sections of Georgia was three ability based groups with approximately 40% of the students in grades one through eight taught in that type of organizational pattern. Approximately 28% were reported to be instructed in skills based groups. Approximately 23% were reported to be instructed in multi-ability groups (those other than three ability groups). Whole class instruction in reading was received by approximately seven percent

of the students. Approximately two percent of the sample were reported to be instructed in individualized programs. Less than one percent were apparently being taught reading in some type of arrangement other than the five mentioned above.

Inspection of Table 1 suggests that while the use of three ability groups was the leading organizational pattern in northeast Georgia (49%), the remainder of the state was almost equally divided in the use of three ability groups (36%) and skills-based instruction (36%). Only 8% of the students in northeast Georgia were being taught in groups based on skills needs rather than on reading ability levels. Approximately 28% of the students in northeast Georgia and 21% of the students in the remainder of the state were enrolled in multi-ability based instruction (those other than three ability based groups). More than twice as many students in northeast Georgia as compared to students in the remainder of the state were being taught reading by whole class instruction (13% to 5%).

The final section of the questionnaire dealt with perceived in-service needs in the school systems. Two items requested respondents to list their perceptions of the needs within the system for college courses and staff development programs. In analyzing responses dealing with perceived course needs, the researchers were able to categorize each response into one of three categories. Of the respondents, 21

school systems indicated a need for formal college courses dealing with basic reading/language arts, diagnosis/diagnostic teaching, and management/organization. Table 2 lists courses requested by five or more school systems.

Table 3 lists categories of inservice and staff development needs which were identified by respondents. Of the respondents, 19 school systems identified specific needs for staff development programs which deal directly or indirectly with reading instruction. Topics dealing with diagnosis and evaluation of pupil performances in reading were requested by 14 school systems (i.e. competency based education, diagnostic procedures, criterion referenced testing, and measurement). Specific topics dealing with reading instruction were requested by six school systems (i.e. reading and language arts, language experience activities, basic instruction in reading, communication skills). Needs for topics related to classroom management, discipline, organization and planning were requested in 17 cases.

Discussion

Analysis of responses to the questionnaires suggests a need for training of teachers in the north Georgia area in the use of patterns of organization other than the traditional classroom organization of three reading groups and whole class instruction. The frequent request for a basic reading course may be in response to the requirement

of such a course for Georgia certification.

It is interesting to note the concerns pertaining to classroom management and organization relative to requests for college courses and staff development programs. This concern coincides with Hankin's (1973) observation:

> How to manage children in the classroom is a major concern of today's teachers; lack of ability in classroom management is a major reason for teacher failure. The success or failure of an instructional program depends on the teacher's ability to establish and maintain a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. (p.84)

On the other hand, the interest is not surprising as teachers face the increasing time and management demands brought about by: "back to basics" movements, due process for students, mainstreaming, and competency based teaching and testing.

Since this study was a pilot study, subsequent research will need to be conducted along lines similar to those in the current study. Because this survey identified three major areas of concern, future questionnaires or needs assessment instruments can now be designed with greater delineation within those three specific areas. In order to gain additional background information regarding how reading is taught, subsequent studies should include a survey of basal reading

series adopted for use in the respective school systems. Such surveys done periodically of perceived college course and inservice needs may provide inservice consultants with background information necessary for planning more effective inservice programs.

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Table 1

Summary Table of the Enrollment in the Major Forms of Organization for Reading Instruction in Two Sections of Georgia.

		Form of Organization					
	Total Enrollment	Three ability groups	Multi-ability based	Individualized	Whole Class	Skills -based	Others
Ninth Congressional District (N=20 systems)	57,461	28,234 (49.14%)	16,223 (28.23%)	706 (1.23%)	7581 (13.19%)	4717 (8.21%)	0 (0%)
Randomly Selected systems from Georgia (N=15 systems)	128,618	46,077 (35.82%)	26,365 (20.50%)	2916 (2.27%)	6163 (4.79%)	46,902 (36.47%)	195 (0.15%)
Totals	186,079	74,311 (39.94%)	42,588 (22.89%)	3,622 (1.95%)	13,744 (7.39%)	51,619 (27.74%)	195 (0.10%)

Table 2

Perceived Course Needs Identified by School Systems in the Sample*

Requests	Number of Requests
Basic Reading/Language Arts	9
Management/Organization	8
Diagnosis/Diagnostic Teaching	5

*More than one need may have been indicated by school system.

Table 3

Perceived Inservice/Staff Development Needs Identified by School Systems in the Sample*

Requests	Number of Requests
Management/Organization	17
Diagnosis/Evaluation	14
Reading/Language Arts Instruction	11

*More than one need may have been indicated by school system.

Appendix A

Definition of Terms

1. Three-ability based groups (the "traditional" three basal reader groups)

   The placement of students in (three) groups within a class according to (reading) ability as shown by standardized and/or informal testing along with teacher observation." (Dauzat and Dauzat, 1981, p. 427)

2. Multi-ability based groups

   Groupings which incorporate different reading and/or achievement levels and are grouped according to interests, research needs, enrichment, and the like.

3. Individualized programs

   Programs designed to allow individual pupils to progress at their own rate in different materials, for example: IPI (Indivdiually Prescribed Instruction), CAI (Computer-assisted Instruction), and programmed materials.

4. Whole class instruction

   Teaching the entire class at one time; full class instruction.

5. Skills-based groups

   Temporary, flexible groupings of "all children who have common reading needs . . . regardless of the level of the reader in which the child is placed." (Dauzat and Dauzat, 1981, p. 218)